

## Thoughts on Creation and Gospel Implications

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he gives all men life, breath, and everything else. From one man, he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'”<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke these words to the political, religious, and philosophical leaders of ancient Athens, Greece. Those attending the Areopagus that day would have held various ideas regarding the origins of life, religion, science, justice, and much more. This was a culture that loved to explore new ideas. In today’s vernacular, we might say that was a “cutting edge” society. After all, the ancient “Greeks search for wisdom,”<sup>2</sup> as the Word of God conveys to us.

Today’s America is not that unlike this ancient culture! In the 21st century, we live in an America that accepts, as, of course, it is “politically proper” all religions and philosophies. How often do we hear, “As long as your religion and beliefs do not impose upon mine, and as long as you keep your beliefs to yourself, there is no problem?” It is this same modern America in which science is often held with great esteem. Our modern public educational systems, at all grade levels, seldom question the claims of science. Modern “theories” become, for all practical purposes, proven facts! If a well-known scientific expert makes a claim and has done the “in-depth” requisite research, how can the average person question his findings? In a September 2010 article entitled “God did not create the Universe,” published by Ontario, Canada’s *Sudbury Star*, the well-known British physicist Stephen Hawking makes the fascinating claim that the law of gravity is proof that the world was created without the personal intervention of a Creator. Hawking said, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, and why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:24-28

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 1:22

and set the universe going.”<sup>3</sup> How many in our age will read the words of Mr. Hawking without challenging his statement? If this renowned intellectual says, it is true, who can doubt him? How many will not even reflect on his statement and ask, where did it originate if there is a law of gravity?

What has been the end result of this common capitulation to scientists and intellectuals of our modern age? The tragic answer is a vast host of young people have grown into adulthood, thinking that science provides the sure answer to the origins of the universe and, indeed, the origins of man! On the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the famous British naturalist Charles Darwin, the Gallup Poll organization conducted a poll asking a simple question. “Do you believe in the theory of evolution?” The results listed in the February 11, 2009, posting of the *US News and World Report* publication was that 39 percent of Americans believe in the theory of evolution. A quarter say they don’t believe in evolution, and 36 percent say they have no opinion.”<sup>4</sup> One should not underestimate the evolution theory’s results on multiple generations. Douglas F. Kelly, writing in his book *Creation and Change*, provides a relevant quote on this matter from Michael Denton. Mr. Denton writes, “The cultural importance of evolution theory is therefore immeasurable, forming as it does the centerpiece, the crowning achievement, of the naturalistic view of the world, the final triumph of the secular thesis which since the end of the Middle Ages has displaced the old naïve cosmology of Genesis from the western mind.”<sup>5</sup>

We live in an age in which the fundamental presupposition that God is the Creator of the heavens, and the earth is missing from the hearts and minds of so many of our family members, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Though God’s “invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made,”<sup>6</sup> vast numbers of mankind “suppress the truth.”<sup>7</sup> Multitudes within our society view the universe as a

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Holden, “Hawking: God Did Not Create the Universe,” *The Sudbury Star*, September 2, 2010, <http://thesudburystar.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2740657>

<sup>4</sup> Dan Gilgoff, “Gallup Darwin’s Birthday Poll: Fewer than Four in Ten Believe in Evolution,” *U.S. News and World Report*, February 11, 2009, <http://politics.usnews.com/news/blogs/god-and-country/2009/02/11/gallup-darwins-birthday-poll-fewer-than-four-in-ten-believe-in-evolution.html>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Denton, “Evolution: A Theory in Crisis” (Adler & Adler: Bethesda, MD 1986) quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, “Creation and Change” (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1997), 26

<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:20

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:18

faceless and impersonal place. Or, if a face or person is assigned, it is someone who goes by the name “Mother Nature”!

In this sad cultural condition, Christians are called upon to bear witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the Apostle Paul, who bears witness to the Creator and Savior of the world in ancient Greek culture, believers today must also faithfully proclaim their Creator and Savior. As the Word of God proclaims in its opening words, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,”<sup>8</sup> so the believer proclaims the same wonderful truth with great joy, confidence, and simplicity.

This paper aims to assert that the biblical doctrine of creation holds great relevance to the gospel proclamation. This, we will see, is evident in the biblical language used by the inspired writers in association with the Christian’s new birth. The joyful good news of reconciliation accomplished by the saving work of the Son of Man is reconciliation with the personal Creator of the Universe. While the Word of God is not intended to be a book of science, Christians must unashamedly declare that “the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”<sup>9</sup> modern man must be reminded that the basis for his existence is not due to some random and impersonal force. Rather, he exists because the God of Holy Scripture has ordered his existence! As a result, modern man is accountable to his Maker! The same power that spoke the creation into existence is the very same power that makes a new creation out of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.”<sup>10</sup> Many new Christians have repeated this well-known phrase made popular by the campus ministry group “Campus Crusade for Christ.” With a sincere desire to share a newfound love for Jesus Christ, many new believers have entered fraternity houses and dormitory rooms across America, declaring God’s great love and “plan” for a person’s life. While we believe that “Salvation comes from the Lord,”<sup>11</sup> and that God, in His great love and mercy, saves His people using various means, how often a puzzled blank stare has met these words from the “Four Spiritual Laws” booklet! Why is that? While one

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 11:3

<sup>10</sup> Campus Crusade for Christ, <http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Jonah 2:9

can accurately state that this reaction is the result of the hardening effect of sin, one can also ask if this is an “appropriate” way to witness to so many who fail to acknowledge that God even exists! Or, if God does exist, they believe He is some impersonal being who somehow triggered the evolutionary forces that have made mankind the highest of all species! While we respect the work of Campus Crusade for Christ, now known as Cru, surely context is an important aspect of the work of evangelism. One only needs to look at the Master Himself sitting by an ancient Samarian well, engaging a woman in spiritual discussion to understand the importance of context and how central it is to our witness. See the Gospel of John chapter four.

People are all different. Family background, life experiences, educational opportunities, and much more all make our friends and neighbors unique. God’s creation of the universe and the creation of the first man and woman bind all mankind together. This is the common ground we all share. Having been created in the “image”<sup>12</sup> of the Creator Himself, and as a result, having received a conscience, the message to a sinful world is that Christ died for sin and conquered death so that we might have peace with our Creator and have eternal life in Him! As a direct result of being made by God, man instinctively wants to know why he exists and what is there after death. The Bible answers these questions. When seeking to make Christ known to a fellow sinner, immediately jumping into “God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life”, assumes the person being addressed has answered the questions of his existence. Douglas F. Kelly, writing in his book *Creation and Change*, describes an interview that was conducted with the late Christian author Frances Schaeffer. Dr. Schaeffer was discussing the importance of the doctrine of creation in the context of evangelism. The following is an excerpt from Dr. Kelly’s book: “Frances Schaeffer, in an interview towards the end of his life with Christopher Catherwood, stated the crucial evangelistic importance of a sound space/time doctrine of creation. The author heard him remark in a discussion group at L’Abri in December of 1968 that if he had an hour with a person on a plane who did not know the Lord, he would spend the first fifty-five minutes talking about creation in the image of God and where that man came from, and the last five minutes on the presentation of the gospel of salvation. Schaeffer felt we are greatly mistaken to avoid the important subject of how we got here, why we are like we are, who is in charge, by whose rules we should play, and by whose rules we will be judged. Schaeffer thought

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 1:26

that when one avoids those questions, which are deeply implanted in every human heart, and jumps immediately to salvation, one loses the major impact on those who are seeking the truth.”<sup>13</sup>

What are some of the biblical themes and concepts that tie the power and work of God’s creation to the gospel message? Though there are many within the Word of God, this paper will identify the following three:

1. The “Word made Flesh”
2. The “First and Second Man”
3. The “New Creation”

The Apostle John’s gospel prologue echoes the opening words of chapter one, verse one of the book of Genesis, “In the beginning.”<sup>14</sup> At the very onset of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is concerned with helping the reader understand the truth about origins. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made.”<sup>15</sup> The pre-existent eternal nature of the Son of God is immediately established. What’s more, this same eternal God has made “all things!” Lest anyone question who the “Word” is, John tells us. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”<sup>16</sup> This is astounding news! The same Creator who spoke the universe and man into existence is the same Creator who came into this world as a man!

The mystery of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is profound. This great truth is vital to the message of evangelism. When we speak of the great love of God for His sinful creatures, what greater love can be demonstrated than the eternal God coming into the world to rescue His people from sin? Far too often, evangelism is narrowly defined. The late Professor

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Catherwood, “Five Evangelical Leaders,” (Christian Focus Publications: Fern, Scotland 1994) quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, “Creation and Change” (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1997), 17

<sup>14</sup> John 1:1

<sup>15</sup> John 1:1-3

<sup>16</sup> John 1:14

John Murray is very helpful in this matter. He writes, “The message of evangelism is the whole counsel of God as revealed in his Word, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Too often, this commonplace statement is not accepted or, if accepted, not appreciated or followed. The cause of evangelism has been greatly prejudiced and hindered by the supposition, far too prevalent, that for the lost, the message has to be restricted to the central elements of the gospel, namely, sin, redemption by the blood of Christ, and the demand for faith and repentance. Indeed, evangelism should always keep in the forefront of its message the central and elementary principles of the gospel, but two facts must be borne in mind: 1) The Scripture pattern will not support the conclusion that the central message of the gospel is the exclusive content of the message of evangelism, and 2) the central message itself cannot properly be presented or understood except as it is presented in the context of the whole counsel of God.”<sup>17</sup> Dr. Murray hits the nail on the head! Context! Christians must take advantage of the whole counsel of God as they lovingly and warmly share the good news of salvation.

Is it a coincidence that the Spirit of God would begin John’s gospel proclaiming the eternal Son’s incarnation? The answer, of course, is a resounding no! How fitting, then, for the believer to bear witness to his Creator’s eternal existence. How wonderful to speak of the eternal Word of God taking upon himself the body of a newborn infant and living among mankind. This wonderfully leads the believer’s witness into the precious truths of salvation through the atonement of the incarnate Son of God.

When reading the creation account in the early chapters of Genesis, one striking and unmistakable characteristic is the order and progression of the Creator’s work. The account of God’s work in seven days moves from chaos to perfect order. This work climaxes in the making of the first man. One might say, with due reverence, that the Almighty Creator of the universe reserves His best work for last! Following the creation of the heavens and the earth, plant, fish, and animal life, notice the language of the biblical text, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So, God created man in his own image; in the image of God, he created him; male

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<sup>17</sup> John Murray, Collected Writings Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 125

and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’<sup>18</sup> What great honor God has bestowed upon mankind! One hears the cry of the Psalmist, “What is man that you are mindful of him.”<sup>19</sup> Douglas Kelly, in his book *Creation and Change*, directs his readers to the comments of John Calvin on Genesis 1:26-28. Calvin highlights the wonderful change in language in these verses that clearly reveals the high position given the first man. Calvin writes, “Hitherto God has been introduced simply as the *commanding*; now when he approaches the most excellent of all his works, he enters *consultation*. God certainly might here command by his bare word what he wished to be done, but he chose to give this tribute to the excellency of man, that he would, in a manner, enter consultation concerning his creation. This is the highest honor with which he has dignified us...”<sup>20</sup>

The high privilege and honor placed upon the first man is evidence of the great value and worth of all mankind. With this foundation, the Christian transitions his witness for Christ into the reality of sin’s entrance into the world. This also explains the reason for the reality of death. The tragedy of the first man’s sin, considering the wonderful position God has given to mankind in His created order, quite naturally leads to the necessity of the “second man”<sup>21</sup> coming into the world. In Romans chapter 5, the Word of God provides careful witness to the contrast between the first man, Adam, and the second man, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle writes, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”<sup>22</sup> The Holy Spirit then directs the readers to the great work of the second man, “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one-man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”<sup>23</sup> The Apostle Paul uses language drawn out from the creation narrative to witness the precious gospel of Jesus Christ! Again, we see the broad usage of the Word of God directly associated with the evangelistic message.

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 8:4

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Calvin’s Commentaries Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 91

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:47

<sup>22</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>23</sup> Romans 5:15

This first and second-man relationship is not limited to the letters of the Apostle Paul. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery is quite helpful in bringing this to light. It states, “In the NT, the comparison of Adam and Christ and the imagery of Christ as a new Adam play a prominent role, particularly in Paul’s letters. But it is not limited to Paul. Luke, for example, traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Adam, ‘son of God,’ and draws us to consider the correlation between Adam and Christ. Adam, as son of God, is the father of humanity, and Jesus, whose divine sonship has just been declared at his baptism (Lk 3:22), is the progenitor of a new people that grows to include members from all nations (Lk 24:46-47). Mark also suggests Adamic imagery in his brief and teasing snapshot of Jesus in the wilderness ‘with the wild beasts.’”<sup>24</sup> The central focus of redemption in Jesus Christ found in God’s Word is astounding! Oh, with what abundance God has revealed Himself in the Saviour of all mankind!

In addition to the “Word made Flesh” and “First and Second Man” themes, another prevalent creation theme linked closely to the gospel message is that salvation in Christ establishes a “New Creation.” The Scripture equates being born of the Spirit of God, saved from death to life, as the work God conducted at creation. The same Spirit of Power that spoke the world into existence is that same Spirit of Power that creates new life in a sinner! The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, expresses this glorious truth, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”<sup>25</sup> Once again, we see that creation is central in the heart and mind of the inspired writer. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, writing on the imagery of the word creation, states, “A final motif is the biblical writers’ treatment of redemption as the crowning work of God’s creation. This is not surprising since much of what is important in creation has been damaged or destroyed by the Fall. As we might expect, redemption and creation are intertwined in the Bible. Christ’s work of redemption is described as restoring those aspects of the creation that were lost or damaged due to the Fall.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Leland Ryken, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998), 12, 13

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>26</sup> Leland Ryken, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998), 181

The joyous good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that those spiritually dead because of sin can be made alive because of the power of God. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,<sup>27</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. We also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature<sup>[a]</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were, by nature, objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”<sup>28</sup>

The creation theme, and all its redemption imagery, is not just reserved for the mature in faith. It is also not intended to be declared only after the listener has experienced conversion. That is not to say that the Christian should not be sensitive to the language he uses when presenting Christ to his unsaved neighbors and friends. Biblical terms and phrases Christians use should always be expressed appropriately with those unfamiliar with the Word of God. However, this does not dismiss the fact that the work of God, in making a “New Creation,” cannot be expressed in common everyday language. Lost mankind must be confronted with the power of an eternal God and their vital need to be “born again.”<sup>29</sup> They must hear that this God-created transformation is not unlike the powerful work that established the heavens and the earth.

This paper has sought to show that the “Word made Flesh,” “First and Second Man,” and “New Creation” themes all point mankind to the Redeemer Himself! They provide God’s solution to man’s deepest need. As such, they benefit the sincere Christians to share their faith with an unsaved world. Ultimately, though, the work of salvation is God’s alone. Though believers must do their best to bring the Word of God to the unsaved, the believer’s wisdom or knowledge never saves. It is always the work of the Holy Spirit that shows a person their sinful condition and leads that person to “find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup> God is pleased to use the efforts of His people in many vast and varied ways. The many conversion accounts in Scripture prove that there is not just one way to witness for Christ. Nonetheless, the

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<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 2:1-5

<sup>28</sup> John 3:3

<sup>29</sup> Romans 5:1

doctrine of Creation and all the associated images we find in Scripture wonderfully assist us in pointing modern culture to our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.